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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 COLOMBO 001019

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STATE FOR SA/INS
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TAGS: [PTER](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [IN](#) [CE](#) [LTTE](#)

SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: JVP THREATENS SHOWDOWN, PRESIDENT
SEEKS SUPPORT FOR JOINT MECHANISM

REF: A. COLOMBO 1004

[1](#)B. COLOMBO 998

[1](#)C. COLOMBO 955

Classified By: AMB. JEFFREY J. LUNSTEAD. REASON: 1.4 (B,D).

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (C) With coalition partner Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) still threatening to withdraw from the government if President Chandrika Kumaratunga signs the "joint mechanism" on tsunami aid with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), Kumaratunga is seeking support for the controversial agreement from Opposition Leader Ranil Wickremesinghe. While the Indian government endorsed the joint mechanism during the President's June 2-4 visit to New Delhi, Wickremesinghe's United National Party (UNP) so far has declined to "rescue" the President by announcing public support. In a June 7 meeting with Peace Secretariat head Jayantha Dhanapala, the Ambassador expressed concern at the steady erosion of the Ceasefire Agreement, underscoring the need for both sides to respect all aspects of the Agreement. Dhanapala said that if the President has not signed the joint mechanism agreement by the June 13 co-chairs meeting--and indicated that she is not expected to--a co-chairs statement endorsing the mechanism could be counter-productive. We think a carefully crafted statement expressing support for the principles underpinning the joint mechanism is necessary. End summary.

IF THE INDIANS SUPPORT IT,
CAN THE JVP BE FAR BEHIND?

[1](#)2. (SBU) President Chandrika Kumaratunga returned from her June 2-4 visit to New Delhi with official--if not effusive--support for the proposed "joint mechanism" on tsunami relief with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam

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(LTTE). (The joint communique noted that the Indian Prime Minister "expressed understanding of and support for" efforts to establish the mechanism, which was identified as the Post Tsunami Operational Management Structure.) Before her

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departure for New Delhi, the President had indicated to a number of western envoys the need to bring the Indians on board before proceeding further.

[1](#)3. (C) In a June 7 meeting with the Ambassador, Indian High Commissioner Nirupama Rao said that her government's support of the mechanism was "neither conditional nor tepid," as indicated in some local Sri Lankan press reports. Rao described Indian government interlocutors as impressed with Kumaratunga's "rational," persuasive and dispassionate arguments in support of the mechanism and emphasized that Indian leaders, including the Prime Minister and Congress leader Sonia Gandhi, understand that the Government of Sri Lanka (GSL) has no option but to work with the LTTE. In a separate meeting with the Ambassador the same day, Jayantha Dhanapala, head of the GSL Peace Secretariat, who had participated in many of the meetings in New Delhi, described the Indians' reception of the mechanism proposal as "very positive," emphasizing that even the Indian Defense Minister had expressed support. Dhanapala added that the Indian trip was necessary to "clear the air" of "murky rumors of Indian opposition" to the mechanism "fabricated" by some political actors in an "effort to change the debate by introducing disquieting rumors."

JVP THREATENS WALK-OUT;
JHU MONKS FASTING

[1](#)4. (U) If the President was hoping that Indian support would help bring the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) around, her

ever-contentious coalition partner moved quickly to quash any such expectation. On June 3 the JVP Politburo decided the party would leave the government if Kumaratunga proceeds with plans to sign the agreement on tsunami relief with the LTTE. On June 5 the party followed up with a second broadside, threatening to withdraw support from the United People's Front Alliance (UPFA) in all seven Provincial Councils if the mechanism were signed. The Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU), a Sinhalese chauvinist party whose Buddhist monk MPs have also vigorously opposed the agreement, issued an even more sensationalist ultimatum to the government on June 6, when JHU Secretary and MP Ven. Sobitha Thero began a well-publicized "fast-unto-death" at the Temple of the Tooth in Kandy, the holiest Buddhist shrine in the nation, to protest the proposed agreement. (Not signing the mechanism is just one of the hunger-striking monk's demands. He is also pressing the government to issue a statement that it will sign no agreements of any kind with the Tigers; to issue a statement guaranteeing that Buddha statues in Trincomalee and Jaffna will not be removed (Ref C); and to ensure adequate security to GSL forces guarding the controversial statue in Trincomalee, as well as to all Army and police intelligence officers.)

15. (C) Japanese DCM Hiroshi Karube told DCM on June 7 that JVP leaders had not wavered from their hard-line position throughout the duration of a May 20-June 2 "study visit" to Japan, despite official Japanese support for the joint mechanism. In fact, he added, JVP leader Somawansa Amarasinghe told the Japanese Ambassador on June 7 that it was "too late" for Kumaratunga to try to win JVP support on the issue, especially since the President had still not even shown the text of the controversial document to her coalition partner.

PRESIDENT PLOTS STRATEGY;
HOPES FOR OPPOSITION SUPPORT

16. (C) According to Health Minister and Kumaratunga confidant Nimal Siripala de Silva, the President held a three-hour meeting on June 6 with Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapakse and de Silva to decide next steps if the JVP continued its opposition. Recounting the discussion to the Ambassador, de Silva summarized the conundrum confronting the President: What is the good of signing the joint mechanism if the JVP pulls out of the government, the government falls and the joint mechanism can never be implemented? To resolve this dilemma, de Silva reported, the President has decided to ask Opposition Leader and former Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe to issue a statement of public support for the mechanism before she signs it. To this end, Kumaratunga will invite Wickremesinghe for a discussion on the topic, de Silva said. In the meantime, the President plans to meet with government MPs, including those from the JVP, the evening of June 7.

17. (C) Dhanapala also briefed the Ambassador on the plan to enlist opposition support for the mechanism, criticizing Wickremesinghe for letting the President "stew in her own juices" while the JVP threatened to quit. Wickremesinghe might have done things differently, Dhanapala conceded, but it is "irresponsible to stand on the sidelines and cheer" at the President's difficulties on an issue of such grave national importance. Unfortunately, Dhanapala said, the joint mechanism has become a lightning rod for all kinds of extremist views. If the mechanism were not signed, he predicted, there was a "great danger of regression" and "a huge loss of credibility for the peace process," especially among the Tamil community. He asked if the Ambassador could help persuade Wickremesinghe to support the proposal. Much of the problem with similar overtures from the President to Wickremesinghe in the past, the Ambassador responded, has been in the way such requests were conveyed--usually in the form of letters that were released to the press at the same time as to Wickremesinghe. Declining to serve as a go-between in such matters, the Ambassador said that the best way to frame the appeal to Wickremesinghe would be to depict the joint mechanism as helping to further the peace process that he started.

18. (C) With respect to the June 13 co-chairs meeting in Washington, Dhanapala said that it would be "awkward" to address the issue of the joint mechanism in a public statement if the agreement had not been signed by the time of the meeting (which, he indicated, was a likely scenario). The co-chairs would face the dilemma of how to modulate a message of support for the mechanism without inciting the "sometimes xenophobic reaction to well-meaning efforts" from western donors that arises from some quarters. He asked that co-chairs consider other ways to increase pressure on the LTTE, including by examining funding funneled through the Tamil diaspora and by pressing for a UN Security Council Resolution condemning LTTE recruitment of child soldiers. He added that disagreement within the P-5 on this issue--with

the UK reportedly "dragging its feet" while the French are "quite keen" to pass the resolution--was apparently to blame for the delay.

AMBASSADOR EXPRESSES CONCERN AT VIOLENCE,
FRAGILITY OF CEASEFIRE

19. (C) Referring to the co-chairs meeting, the Ambassador noted to Dhanapala that if international interest in the peace process is to be sustained, there must be an actual peace process that can be identified. If the joint mechanism cannot be concluded, he continued, how can the more comprehensive agreements needed to achieve a lasting settlement be concluded? The Ceasefire Agreement (CFA) has become badly frayed, the Ambassador stressed, and the ensuing violence is "detrimental to all sides." Both parties to the CFA seem to have decided on a de facto abrogation of key parts of the Agreement, he emphasized, undermining the security situation and inflaming public opinion. While the LTTE is undeniably the main culprit in violating the ceasefire, the accelerated tit-for-tat violence is creating an explosive situation. (Note: Two alleged LTTE intelligence agents were killed in Colombo on June 5, for example. End note.) When Dhanapala objected to suggestions that the GSL shared some of the blame for the violence, the Ambassador replied that it strained credulity to suppose that anti-LTTE Karuna forces--some of which operate from camps next to GSL security installations--do not at least receive Government acquiescence. Dhanapala did not respond.

UNP: NOT TO THE "RESCUE"

10. (C) In a June 7 meeting with the Ambassador, Opposition Leader Wickremesinghe said he would not release a public statement supporting the mechanism before the President actually signed the agreement. To do otherwise would only serve to "rescue" the President from her own political problems, which, he said bluntly, he was disinclined to do. In the meantime, he said, the President should prepare a contingency plan in case the JVP quits the government. One of her options, he continued, is to begin to talk seriously with his United National Party (UNP); alternatively, she could continue to "play games" by trying to lure UNP MPs across the aisle. Pressed by the Ambassador, he conceded that he might agree to meet with the President if she were to invite him. He also conceded that the UNP would have to support the joint mechanism if it were signed.

LTTE: STILL READY TO SIGN

11. (C) Swiss Ambassador Bernardino Regazzoni told the Ambassador on June 6 that he had visited LTTE headquarters in Kilinochchi on June 2 and met with LTTE political wing leader Thamilselvan. According to Regazzoni, Thamilselvan asserted that the LTTE remains ready to sign the joint mechanism. Regazzoni added that Thamilselvan himself raised the fragility of the Ceasefire Agreement, describing the CFA as key to further progress on the peace process. Regazzoni responded that the ongoing LTTE campaign of violence, including the killing of Sri Lanka Army Major Muthaliff (Ref B), was seriously undermining the ceasefire; such violations were "devastating" for the image of the LTTE in the south and with donors, Regazzoni stressed. Thamilselvan neither confirmed nor denied LTTE involvement in Muthaliff's slaying.

COMMENT

12. (C) Some observers had speculated that support from the Indian government, which has studiously cultivated the renegade JVP over the past year, could be sufficient to mute the party's strident opposition to the mechanism. So far, that has not proven to be the case. It is hard to tell if the JVP, which has threatened to leave this government so many times before, is just practicing brinkmanship or whether it has already packed its bags. Conventional wisdom holds that while the JVP might do even better in a fresh parliamentary poll than it did last April, it would still not do well enough to win anything more than a repeat performance as a junior coalition partner in another government. Wickremesinghe's apparent decision to sit back and watch the President squirm may not be statesmanlike, but it is hardly surprising, given the personal enmity between the two party leaders. Unfortunately, their mutual antipathy is preventing cooperation on an issue of grave national importance--while simultaneously letting the JVP capitalize, at the expense of

both of these mainstream parties, on the stalemate. Despite Dhanapala's concern that a co-chairs' statement on the mechanism could be counter-productive, we believe that a carefully crafted statement expressing support for a structure to coordinate tsunami assistance--even if that structure is not directly identified as a joint mechanism--is needed.

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